



City of Columbia, Missouri

Board and Commission Feedback Report

Written 04/10/2025

Purpose

In November 2024, a survey was distributed to the City of Columbia’s boards and commissions members to gather valuable insights and identify opportunities for enhancing effectiveness and communication. One of the last surveys of this nature was conducted in 2012, highlighting the importance of this updated evaluation.

Regular assessment of boards and commissions is critical to ensuring they operate effectively, remain accountable, and align with the community’s evolving needs. Over 300 volunteer members support the City of Columbia, who generously contribute their time and expertise to serve on various boards and commissions.

Methodology

The survey was designed for board and commission members to complete anonymously to encourage candid and constructive feedback. The initial survey distribution occurred on November 25, 2024, with a completion deadline of December 23, 2024. Two reminder emails were sent during the response period to maximize participation.

The survey was sent to 330 active board and commission members, excluding vacant positions. A total of 137 responses were received, resulting in a 41.5% response rate. This calculation reflects the number of members at the time the survey was conducted. Table 1 provides a detailed breakdown of response rates by individual boards and commissions.

Table #1: Number of Responses Per Board and Commission

Airport Advisory Board	5 out of 12
Bicycle/Pedestrian Commission	3 out of 10
Board of Adjustment	4 out of 8
Board of Health	5 out of 10
Building Construction Commission	8 out of 19
Citizens Police Review Board	4 out of 6
City of Columbia New Century Fund Board	1 out of 6
Climate and Environment Commission	7 out of 15
Columbia Sports Commission	7 out of 14
Commission on Cultural Affairs	6 out of 12
Commission on Human Rights	1 out of 7
Community Land Trust Organization Board	4 out of 9
Convention and Visitors Advisory Board	11 out of 12
Cultural Affairs Standing Committee on Public Art	2 out of 5
Disabilities Commission	4 out of 12
Finance Advisory Audit Committee	1 out of 8

Firefighters' Retirement Board	3 out of 5
Food Council	3 out of 9
Historic Preservation Commission	4 out of 7
Housing and Community Development Commission	3 out of 8
Human Services Commission	8 out of 10
Mayor's Council on Physical Fitness and Health	3 out of 11
Mayor's Task Force on the U.S.S Columbia	4 out of 12
Parking Advisory Commission	2 out of 7
Parks and Recreation Commission	2 out of 7
Police Retirement Board	1 out of 5
Personnel Advisory Board	2 out of 6
Planning and Zoning	6 out of 9
Public Transit Advisory Commission	4 out of 11
Railroad Advisory Board	3 out of 7
Rock Quarry Road Scenic Roadway Stakeholder Advisory Group	0 out of 9
Substance Use Advisory Commission	5 out of 10
Tax Increment Financing Commission	1 out of 5
Tree Board	4 out of 7
Water and Light Advisory Board	2 out of 5
Youth Advisory Council	4 out of 15

The survey focused on five primary categories: roles, goals, and responsibilities; meeting structure and productivity; decision-making and follow-up; onboarding; and recommendations. Upon receiving initial responses from board and commission members, recurring key terms and themes were identified across the various groups.

Following this, a secondary survey was distributed to department heads and liaisons associated with these boards and commissions on January 28, 2025, with a submission deadline of February 18, 2025. Two follow-up reminder emails were sent during this period to encourage participation.

A response was received from each board and commission representative. After collecting feedback from board and commission members, department heads and liaisons, the responses were reviewed comparatively. Emphasis was placed on identifying overlapping key terms and themes that emerged consistently across both groups.

Key Themes

1) Clarification of Roles and Responsibilities

A recurring theme identified through feedback received from board and commission members and department heads and liaisons is the need for clarity regarding the roles and responsibilities. Many members expressed uncertainty in their roles and responsibilities and the alignment of their work with City priorities.

While boards and commissions are established to provide informed recommendations and community insight, the channels of communication, expectations for collaboration and reporting structures are not always well defined. This can lead to confusion about how their work is utilized. Clarifying these roles and responsibilities is essential to enhancing the overall effectiveness of these boards and commissions. Clear guidance will ensure that:

- Members understand the scope of their responsibilities and the nature of their contributions.
- There is a structured communication plan between boards, City Staff and the City Council.
- Expectations regarding meeting procedures, reporting requirements and feedback loops are standardized.
- Members feel empowered and supported in their roles, fostering greater engagement and accountability.

Establishing clear guidance in roles and responsibilities will significantly improve coordination and ensure that the valuable work of boards and commissions is aligned with the City's priorities.

2) Enhancement to Onboarding and Training

Many boards and commissions lack formalized onboarding procedures, which can be a key barrier to member effectiveness. The gap in preparation of new appointees could lead to confusion, reduced engagement, and delays in contributing meaningfully to the board's objectives.

Effective onboarding ensures members have the knowledge and tools to participate confidently and competently. It also supports consistency in decision-making and fosters a sense of purpose and accountability among members.

By establishing a more intentional and consistent onboarding process, the City can enhance member preparedness, reduce early turnover and strengthen the overall effectiveness of boards and commissions. Investing in member onboarding will ultimately lead to better-informed discussions, more cohesive board dynamics and stronger outcomes aligned with community needs.

3) Enhancing Representation and Inclusive Participation

Several boards and commissions have identified a need to improve representation across demographics and areas of expertise. Not having a full range of perspectives can limit the ability of these boards and commissions to understand and address community needs fully.

Broadening representation ensures that various lived experiences, professional backgrounds and cultural perspectives are included in the decision-making process. This diversity leads to more thoughtful and informed recommendations, strengthens community trust and promotes equity in civic engagement.

Some municipalities have designated staff or outreach coordinators tasked with recruitment and engagement for boards and commissions. These individuals take a proactive approach to increasing participation by:

- Attending community events, forums, and neighborhood meetings.
- Hosting informational tables or presentations that explain the role and impact of boards and commissions.
- Partnering with local organizations, groups and advocacy networks to reach additional populations.
- Developing promotional material highlighting the value of civic participation and specific skills needed for various boards and commissions.

Implementation of a similar strategy could enhance the diversity and effectiveness of boards and commissions. A designated outreach role would ensure a sustained and intentional effort to recruit qualified individuals from across all sectors of the community.

4) Efficiency and Transparency

Several boards and commissions have emphasized the importance of submitting regular reports to the City Council and maintaining a high level of transparency in their operations. Regular reporting serves as a key accountability mechanism, ensuring that the work of these boards and commissions is visible, accessible and aligned with the City's priorities.

One of the primary benefits of requiring annual reports is that it ensures the City Council remains well informed about the ongoing activities, accomplishments and challenges faced by each board and commission. These reports provide a structured summary of key actions, issues addressed, recommendations made and progress toward their goals. Doing these reports would help validate the relevance and impact of each board's and commission's work.

Additionally, regular reporting contributes to increased transparency, which fosters public trust and confidence in the advisory process. Transparency reporting demonstrates that boards and commissions align with the community's evolving needs.

Having these reports supports timely evaluation and a responsive governance. By reviewing regular updates, the City Council and City Staff can identify areas where support or resources are

needed, community concerns, opportunities for policy adjustments or shifts in focus and redundancies in board and commission functions.

These insights can enable more proactive and strategic decision-making, allowing the City to remain responsive to the community's evolving needs. Regular reporting can enhance accountability, transparency, and collaboration between boards and commissions, the City Council, City Staff, and the public.

5) Improved Engagement with City Council and Staff

Many boards and commissions have expressed a need for a more structured and consistent communication channel with the City Council to ensure that their recommendations, insights, and expertise are considered and acted upon in a timely manner. While boards and commissions are established to support informed policymaking, there is often a disconnect between the work being done at the board and commission level and the decision-making process at the City Council level.

Several members mentioned a lack of clarity about how their input is received, evaluated and integrated into City policies or initiatives. Without a defined feedback loop, boards and commissions may feel that their contributions are not fully acknowledged or that the value of their work is diminished. This lack of communication can lead to frustration among members and a missed opportunity for specialized knowledge and community insight that these boards and commissions provide. Additionally, some boards and commissions mentioned that they felt like their expertise was not being fully utilized.

Current Annual Reports

March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Citizens Police Review Board ● Housing and Community Development Commission
June	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Climate and Environment Commission ● Firefighters’ Retirement Board ● Police Retirement Board
August	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Columbia Sports Commission ● Convention and Visitors Advisory Board ● Human Services Commission
December	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● City of Columbia New Century Fund Board ● Water and Light Advisory Board

No Annual Report

- Airport Advisory Board

- Bicycle/Pedestrian Commission
- Boards of Adjustment
- Board of Health
- Building Construction Commission
- Commission on Human Rights
- Community Land Trust Organization Board
- Cultural Affairs Standing Committee on Public Art
- Mayor’s Council on Physical Fitness and Health
- Mayor’s Task Force on the U.S.S Columbia
- Parking Advisory Commission
- Personnel Advisory Board
- Railroad Advisory Board

Other Reporting Styles

These boards and commissions utilize alternative reporting methods or formats:

- Commission of Cultural Affairs
- Historic Preservation Commission
- Planning and Zoning
- Finance Advisory Audit Committee

Reports Discussed

These boards and commissions are discussing having an annual report or are currently working on a report.

- Disabilities Commission
- Food Council
- Public Transit Advisory Commission
- Substance Use Advisory Commission
- Tree Board
- Youth Advisory Council

Onboarding Recommendations

Staff liaisons, Law Department Staff, and department heads are available for one-on-one training and to answer any questions. Several boards and commissions do not have a structured onboarding process but have expressed interest in developing one. Some boards and commissions provide new members with handbooks, ordinances, funding guidelines, and relevant documents. Others introduce new members at meetings and encourage them to ask questions.

The onboarding process varies widely, from structured meetings and manuals to informal email introductions or verbal explanations. Some boards and commissions schedule annual training on legal requirements shortly after new appointments. These include Sunshine Law overviews and conflict of interest. Some boards and commissions provide targeted training on their unique responsibilities, such as grant funding, regulatory processes, and board/commission missions. There is interest in creating a more consistent and structured onboarding process across different boards and commissions.

Each board and commission should discuss what onboarding would work best for their group. Formalized training covering similar topics such as the Sunshine Law and the governance structure could help reduce new members feeling behind or confused at the start of their position. However, having their specialized onboarding would benefit each board and commission. The missions, activities, and roles of each board and commission are widely different, which could prove challenging to make a singular onboarding process for all boards and commissions. It is suggested that the board and commission members have this discussion alongside city staff liaisons to discuss the best route for onboarding.

Example Template for Onboarding Practices

I. Pre-Appointment Engagement

- A. Provide prospective members with an overview of the board's mission, responsibilities, and expectations.
- B. Share details on time commitments, ethical considerations, and any legal obligations.
- C. Ensure they understand the appointment process and term length.

II. Welcome & Orientation Materials

- A. **Welcome Packet** (Digital & Printed Copy) including:
 1. Board/Commission bylaws and governing legislation
 2. Strategic plans, key initiatives, and recent reports
 3. Meeting schedule and attendance expectations
 4. Contact list of board members and city staff
 5. FAQs on roles and responsibilities
- B. **Training Manual** covering:
 1. Policies and procedures
 2. Decision-making authority and governance structure
 3. Ethics, conflict of interest guidelines, and Sunshine Law overview
 4. **City Handbook** for all boards and commissions (if available).
 5. **Boards and Commissions Members' Guide**

III. Initial One-on-One Meeting

- A. Conducted by the staff liaison within the first two weeks of appointment.
- B. Topics covered:
 - 1. Board mission, goals, and recent accomplishments
 - 2. Relationship with the City Council and other advisory bodies
 - 3. Budget overview and funding sources (if applicable)
 - 4. Explanation of key policies and legal responsibilities
 - 5. Tour of any relevant city facilities (if applicable)

IV. Formal Orientation Session

- A. Hosted within the first month of appointment.
 - 1. Key agenda items:
 - a) Overview of governance structure and city priorities
 - b) Review of parliamentary procedures (Robert's Rules of Order)
 - c) Legal responsibilities (Sunshine Law, Conflict of Interest Law, ethics training)
 - d) Roles of the chairperson, staff liaison, and members
 - e) Case studies or examples of past board actions
 - f) Participation from experienced board members to share insights.

V. Introduction to Fellow Members

- A. New members introduced at their first meeting.
- B. Assignment of a mentor/buddy (an experienced board member) to assist with onboarding.

VI. Training on Key Topics

- A. Workshops or training sessions offered on:
 - 1. Open meeting, conflict of interest, ethics and transparency laws
 - 2. Budgeting and financial responsibilities
 - 3. Advisory role of the board or commission and policy development, if directed by the city council
 - 4. Specific areas related to the board's work (e.g., land use, economic development, public art, and more.)
 - 5. Group dynamics and share your voice

VII. Ongoing Support & Check-Ins

- A. Staff liaison schedules a 3-month and 6-month follow-up meeting to address any questions or concerns.
- B. Encourage continued education.
- C. Foster open communication through regular updates and engagement opportunities.

VIII. Evaluation & Continuous Improvement

- A. Conduct an onboarding feedback survey after six months.
- B. Regularly update training materials based on feedback and policy changes.
- C. Explore digital onboarding options such as an online training portal.

IX. Additional Recommendations

- A. Consider an annual board retreat or strategic planning session.
- B. Provide ongoing networking opportunities with other board members and city officials.
- C. Encourage new members to observe at least one meeting before their official start date.

Other City Examples:

<https://steamboatsprings.net/DocumentCenter/View/23321/Board-and-Commission-Onboarding-Checklist>

https://www.cityofgraham.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/DRAFT-B_CHandbook.pdf